

# **The United States and Iran: Potential Friends or Continuing Enemies**

**A Monograph  
by  
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## **Abstract**

THE UNITED STATES AND IRAN: POTENTIAL FRIENDS OR CONTINUING ENEMIES by MAJ John B. Van Hook, United States Army, 50 pages.

In the past three decades, one country has stood out more than any other in opposing the United States' efforts in the Middle East: Iran. The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran views the United States, with its interference in the Middle East and especially its support of the State of Israel, as a threat to its revolutionary ideology. As a result, the Islamic Republic of Iran has focused its efforts on disrupting United States' activities in the region over the past thirty years. Now with the current focus of the United States on defeating terrorism and with the subsequent United States led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran has the perfect opportunity to further its influence in the Middle East.

To counter Iranian influences in the Middle East, the United States has adopted a stance of containment towards Iran, which is similar in nature to what the United States did in containing the Soviet Union during the Cold War. However, for all of the effort towards isolating Iran and preventing it from influencing the region, the containment strategy is flawed. Iran is not the Soviet Union; both are unique in their goals, strategies, and personalities.

If containment is flawed, then what is the right strategy with Iran? When the United States curtailed its support to the Shah and his government in the 1970s, it enabled the Islamic Revolution theocracy that replaced the Shah to achieve a legitimacy that would in turn strengthen its moral prestige and power in the region. Since then, the United States has treated Iran either as an enemy or as a neutral. After thirty years, the United States should alter its policy towards Iran.

To neutralize this growing threat from a Radical Islamic Iran, the United States, the West, and Sunni dominated countries of the Persian Gulf region need to end the strategy of containment. Instead, they need to work together and use the favorable aspects of Globalization along with the Elements of National Power, i.e. Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) to force a favorable change to Iran's aspirations. In the end, the breach between the United States and Iran must be healed in order to ensure the long-term stability of in the Middle East.

The focus of this study is to look at several aspects of the United States/Iran relationship. The first is the history between the two countries since World War II. The second section is focused on the United States' interest in the Middle East and Iran and how the Middle East and Iran are tied to each other. The third section looks at Iran's current status and goals. The fourth section looks towards finding a solution to the problem between the United States and Iran.

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# Introduction

## Background and Significance

In the past three decades, one country has stood out more than any other in opposing the United States' efforts in the Middle East: Iran. In 2007, during his testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, R. Nicholas Burns, the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, said:

For nearly three decades, dealing with Tehran's confrontational ideology and strident anti-Americanism has been a persistent dilemma for our country. But never have the concerns regarding Iran's intentions been more serious, the intricacies of Iranian politics more significant, or the policy imperatives more urgent than they are today. Under President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, Tehran has embarked on a dangerous course—repeatedly defying its obligations under international law and appalling the world with the most abhorrent, irresponsible rhetoric from a world leader in many years.<sup>1</sup>

Discord between the United States and Iran has not always been the case; Iran was the United States' closest Islamic ally in the Middle East for 25 years.

From the mid 1940s until the late 1970s, the United States was deeply involved in supporting the corrupt government of the former Shah of Iran, primarily through economic and military aid. In exchange for this support, the United States gained a valued ally and a key port of entry that was focused on the furthering of the United States' goals in the Middle East. In addition to this important access into the Middle East, Iran served as a deterrent to Soviet expansion in the region. In 1977, with the election of a morally idealistic President Jimmy Carter, that key ally was lost when the United States made the decision to cut off aid to the Shah's corrupt government. With the loss of influence in Iran through the Shah, the United States also lost an opportunity to redeem a politically corrupt individual and country.

With the loss of support from the United States, the exiled Islamic Revolution theocracy controlled by the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini replaced the Shah's government and strengthened its moral prestige and power in the region. Ilan Berman, the vice president of the American Foreign Policy Council saw this ending of support to the Shah and the resulting "1979 Islamic revolution that swept

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<sup>1</sup> R. Nicholas Burns. "United States Policy Towards Iran". (Washington D.C.: Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 2007). 3.

Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini and his radical band of political Islam to power in Teheran, transformed one of America's greatest allies in the Middle East into a violent, totalitarian theocracy committed to the destruction of the United States."<sup>2</sup> The consequences of the Islamic Revolution and the subsequent seizing of the American embassy in Iran in 1979 would contribute to Carter's loss of the presidency in 1980 and years of mutual hostility between the two countries.

The new government of the Islamic Republic of Iran viewed the United States, with its interference in the Middle East and especially its support of the Jewish State of Israel, as a threat to its revolutionary ideology. According to Ray Takeyh, a Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, the Iranian Revolution was to be "a 'revolution without borders'; seeking to emancipate the Islamic *ummah* from the transgressors of American Imperialism and Israeli Zionism."<sup>3</sup> As a result, the Islamic Republic of Iran has focused its efforts towards disrupting United States activities in the region over the past thirty years. Now with the current focus of the United States on defeating terrorism and with the subsequent United States led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, Iran has the perfect opportunity to further its influence in the Middle East. In other words, because of the actions of the United States, Iran is on the verge of achieving a regional hegemony. Berman stated:

In short, by breaking up of the old order in neighboring countries, the United States has given the Islamic Republic unimaginable opportunities to influence the region. As Iranian policymakers are quick to point out, all signs suggest that Iran is now destined to become the centre of international power politics in the post-Saddam Middle East.<sup>4</sup>

If the United States continues its current trend of regime change and interfering with the affairs of countries in the Middle East, Iran will be allowed to achieve regional hegemony.

In order to achieve a regional hegemony, Iran has instituted three primary strategies; upsetting or influencing democratic based Middle East governments, supporting extremist Muslim organizations, and

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<sup>2</sup> Ilan Berman. *Teheran Rising: Iran's Challenge to the United States*. (Rowman and Littlefield Publishing, 2005). xviii.

<sup>3</sup> Ray Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*. New York: (Times Books, 2006). 4.

<sup>4</sup> Berman. *Teheran Rising*. xvii.

the developing of nuclear weapons. Anthony H. Cordesman, a national security analyst and a chair with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, views Iran as a threat in five categories:

The first is as a conventional military power... The second is as an asymmetric threat that can seek to intimidate or attack using nonconventional forces... The third is to some extent an extension of the second. Iran's asymmetric and unconventional capabilities give it the ability to use proxies and partners in the form of both state and non-state actors... The fourth is a potential nuclear power armed with long-range missiles... Finally, Iran presents a potential religious and ideological threat in a region and Islamic world polarized along sectarian lines...<sup>5</sup>

Iran's focus on upsetting or influencing of democratically based Middle East governments and its support of extremist Muslim organizations that use terrorism to further their ends are overlapping issues. The United States and its allies, the United Kingdom and Israel, have accused Iran of sponsoring terrorism against their respective countries. These extremist Muslim organizations include Hezbollah, Hamas, and the al-Mahdi Army, groups that Iran does not view as terrorist organizations. The United States and the United Kingdom have also accused Iran of supporting Shiite militias in Iraq, of which have attacked coalition troops, Iraqi Sunni militias, and civilians. Lastly, Iran has aggressively been expanding a nuclear research program that has the potential to produce nuclear weapons. The implications of what Iran can accomplish if left unchecked are sobering for the Middle East and the world in general.

In order to counter these actions, the United States has adopted a stance of containment towards Iran. Vali Nasr, a Professor in the Department of National Security Affairs at the Naval Postgraduate School, and Takeyh noted, "Taking a page out of its early Cold War playbook, Washington hopes to check and possibly reduce Tehran's growing influence much as it foiled the Soviet Union's expansionist designs: by projecting its own power while putting direct pressure on its enemy and building a broad-based alliance against it."<sup>6</sup> The United States has tried to isolate Iran through economic and diplomatic means. This includes using influences and sanctions from the United States' traditional allies in the West

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony H Cordesman. "Iran: "Weakling" or "Hegemon"?" (Washington D.C. Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2007). 2

<sup>6</sup> Ray Takeyh and Vali Nasr. "The Costs of Containing Iran." (*Foreign Affairs*, 2008). 1.

and the United Nations. Additionally, the United States has invaded and occupied Afghanistan to the east and Iraq to the west of Iran, which allows for a Western presence and influence that could physically cross Iran's borders. The United States has befriended and strengthened Iran's traditional enemies, Sunni dominated Saudi Arabia and the other Persian Gulf-based Arab countries. To the north of Iran, the United States has influence in Azerbaijan and is allied with Turkey. Further to the east, the United States has an additional ally in Pakistan, with which it was a partner in ousting the Soviets from Afghanistan in the 1980s. Today, Pakistan serves to block Iran from expansion to the east.

Yet, for all of the effort towards isolating Iran and preventing it from influencing the region, the containment strategy is flawed. Iran is not the Soviet Union; both are unique in their goals, strategies, and personalities. Takeyh and Nasr referred to this:

The realities of the Middle East will eventually defeat Washington's Cold War fantasies. This is not to say that Iran does not pose serious challenges to United States, Arab, or Israeli interests. But envisioning that a grand United States.-Arab-Israeli alliance can contain Iran will sink Afghanistan, Iraq, and Lebanon into greater chaos; inflame Islamic radicalism; and commit the United States to a lengthy and costly presence in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup>

For the United States to use the same containment strategy on Iran as it did on the Soviet Union will not work and in turn will only worsen the Middle East situation.

## **Hypothesis**

If containment is flawed, then what is the right strategy with Iran? Does the United States want Iran as an enemy, a friend, or a neutral acquaintance? When the United States curtailed its support to the Shah and his government in the 1970s, it enabled the exiled Islamic Revolution theocracy that replaced the Shah to achieve a legitimacy that would in turn strengthen the Islamic Revolution's moral prestige and power in the region. Since then, the United States has treated Iran as an enemy at worst or as a neutral at best. After thirty years, the United States should alter its policy towards Iran.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.,92.

To counter and neutralize this growing threat from a Radical Islamic Iran, the United States, the West, and Sunni dominated countries of the Persian Gulf region need to end the strategy of containment. Instead, they need to work together and try to use the favorable aspects of Globalization along with the Elements of National Power, i.e. Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME) to force a favorable change to Iran's aspirations.

Having Iran as an ally will help stabilize the region and deter aggression between the historical enemies of the Sunni Arab Gulf States and Persian Shiite Iran. Additionally, it will help in the curbing of Iranian influence in Lebanon and Iraq. If the United States persists with this course of isolationism against Iran, then Iran has the ability to achieve regional hegemony in the Middle East. With the power that comes with hegemony, Iran will continue to spread its anti-American hatred to other countries in the region. Berman best described this:

The choices made by Washington will determine the geopolitical balance of power in the greater Middle East, and the long-term success of American strategy there. And, perhaps more than any other issue, these choices will dictate whether the United States can claim victory on a crucial front in the War on Terror, or if America's vision of the region becomes a victim of Iran's successes.<sup>8</sup>

In the end, the breach between the United States and Iran must be healed in order to ensure the long-term stability of American influences in the Middle East.

## **Methodology**

The focus of this study is to look at several aspects of the United States/Iran relationship. The first is the history between the two countries since World War II. The second section is focused on the United States' interest in the Middle East and Iran and how the Middle East and Iran are tied to each other. The third section looks at Iran's current status and goals. The fourth section looks towards finding a solution to the problem between the United States and Iran.

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<sup>8</sup> Berman. *Teheran Rising*. 148.

## Historical Background

To set the stage for understanding the current problems and status between the United States and Iran, an understanding of the history of Iran and its interactions with other countries is important. This history includes Persia and its Anglo-Russian rivalry prior to and during World War II. After World War II, the United Kingdom maintained control over Iran. Iran's struggle to break that control eventually led to the relationship between the Shah and the United that lasted until 1979. Lastly, the historical context covers the interaction between the government that replaced the, the Islamic Republic of Iran, and the United States from 1979 until present day.

### Persia and its Anglo-Russian Rivalry

Prior to World War II, there was a traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry over Iran (then known as Persia), that dated back to the 18th Century. Amin Saikal, Director of the Centre for Arab and Islamic Studies suggested, “[t]he strategic location of Iran in a zone between Europe and Asia placed the country within the geographical perimeters of Russian security and aspirations as well as on the margin of British colonial expansion and on its imperial lines of communication.”<sup>9</sup> Iran's critical location would play a prominent role in the Anglo-Russian rivalry for the 150 years. It was only after World War II that the United States and Iran became close allies.

From 1794 to 1925, the Qajar dynasty was the ruler of Iran. In 1923, Rezā Shāh Pahlavi, a senior Iranian army officer, conducted a coup and overthrew the Qajar dynasty. In 1925, this coup resulted in Rezā Shāh Pahlavi being proclaimed the Shah of Iran and his son, Mohammad Rezā Shāh, the crown Prince. With the onset of World War II, the Allies saw a need to use Iran as a corridor of supply from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea in order to supply the Soviets. However, in deference to his sympathetic leanings towards Nazi Germany, Rezā Shāh Pahlavi, chose to remain neutral and refused the Allies'

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<sup>9</sup> Amin Saikal. *The Rise and Fall of the Shah*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). 11.

request to use his country. As a result, the United Kingdom and the Soviets, with American support, launched a joint invasion of Iran. Saikal stated that the invasion of Iran by the Allies favored the Allies in that, “the Soviets secured a viable supply route and freed them from anxiety that the Germans might make a thrust from Iran against the Soviet oilfields at Baku.”<sup>10</sup> Because of the elder Shah’s loyalties to Nazi Germany, the Allies pressured the elder Shah to abdicate his throne in favor of his son and forced him into exile in South Africa, where he died in 1944. Saikal noted that that new Shah was lacking in several leadership qualities that would make him the perfect figurehead to the Allies. “Mohammad Rezā Shāh was 20 years old, inexperienced, and wielded little real power, but he suited the Allied forces in their desire to legitimize their actions in Iran.”<sup>11</sup> The result of the actions of the Allies in forcing an Iranian regime change would cause Iranians to distrust Westerners in general in the years to come.

## **The Shah and the United States**

After World War II, the United Kingdom informally controlled Iran. In exchange for allowing the British Petroleum owned Anglo-Iranian Oil Company to drill for oil in Iran, Iran was allowed a degree of freedom in running its internal affairs under the Shah. Since the Shah was weak, several Iranian political parties grew in popularity. One of the stronger parties was the communist-backed Tudeh Party, which allowed Mosaddeq to come to power as prime minister in May 1951. Mosaddeq was a believer in secular democracy and was against Western foreign domination in Iran. Upon his appointment by the Iranian legislature as prime minister, Mosaddeq immediately took steps to nationalize the Iranian oil industry, which resulted in the United Kingdom losing control over its Iranian oil assets and the Iranian government becoming the sole owner. According to Saikal:

Mosaddeq declared the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) nationalized on May 1, and in return promised compensation, he set up the National Iranian Oil Company to take

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 26.

over from the AIOC. The nationalization meant Iranian ownership and control of the oil industry.<sup>12</sup>

Over the next two years, the diplomatic confrontation between the United Kingdom and Iran increased and in 1953 Mosaddeq moved to strengthen his position by attempting to strip certain key constitutional powers from the Shah. The Eisenhower Administration, under the guise of curbing communism and responding to the United Kingdom's calls for support, launched a CIA-led coup in August of 1953, which forced Mossaddeq out of office. This resulted in the Shah gaining more power and a shift of influence from the United Kingdom to the United States. Saikal noted:

This resulted in three major developments: Iran's growing dependence on the United States and alliance with the West in the 1950s; Iran's assumption of outright opposition to communism; and the transformation of the traditional Anglo-Russian rivalry into the American-Soviet rivalry; from then on the United States, not Britain, was the major protagonist in Iran and the world against the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup>

Upon the Shah's rise in stature, he took advantage of the United States' support, and attempted to build his country into a Westernized industrial state that often ignored traditional Muslim values. With the Shah's focus on industrialization and with the assets of the Iranian oil reserves, the United States saw Iran as a strategic partner in protecting and promoting its influences in the Middle East.

The United States government's support to the Shah consisted of military equipment, in exchange for which the Shah and Iran would influence state actions in the region and in the world on behalf of the United States. These actions were mostly diplomatic and military in nature. Lyn Boyd, a Adjunct Professor for the School of International Relations, University of Southern California, suggested:

The Shah had militarily intervened on the behalf of the United States in Oman. Again, at the request of the United States, he had secretly provided weapons to Somalia for use against Ethiopia. He had personally persuaded South Africa (a regime reliant on Iranian oil) to stop shipping oil to Rhodesia when the United States supported an embargo of

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 45.

Rhodesia. When asked, the Shah had established peace with Iraq, although his initiative was criticized from within Iran.<sup>14</sup>

Over the next three decades, the Shah's diplomatic and military actions continued to prove that he was a trusted ally and agent in supporting of the United States interests in the Middle East and the world

Upon the election of President Jimmy Carter in 1976, this military aid rapidly came to a halt due to Carter's view that the United States would cease being an arms merchant to countries where human rights violations were the norm. These human rights violations became apparent to Carter when an accusation against the Shah was presented before the United Nations. Boyd wrote:

Allegations of torture of political detainees were made public by the UN Commission on Human Rights.... In December 1978, Amnesty International said it had received information that "clearly indicates that Iran had reneged on her own undertakings and had violated international law."<sup>15</sup>

In viewing these allegations, Carter decided that even though the Shah's human rights violations might have been overlooked in the past they would no longer be tolerated by the United States. Gaddis Smith, a Yale Professor who specialized in diplomatic relations, viewed the situation in the following:

President Carter inherited an impossible situation -- and he and his advisers made the worst of it. Carter seemed to have a hard time deciding whether to heed the advice of his aggressive national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who wanted to encourage the Shah to brutally suppress the revolution, or that of his more cautious State Department, which suggested Carter reach out to opposition elements in order to smooth the transition to a new government. In the end, he did neither, and suffered the consequences.<sup>16</sup>

With the United States severing military support, there was a resulting weakening of the Shah's government, which in turn, encouraged the beginnings of the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

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<sup>14</sup> Lyn Boyd. *A King's Exile: The Shah of Iran and Moral Considerations in U.S. Foreign Policy*. Case Study, (Washington D.C.: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, 2000). 2.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>16</sup> PBS. 1995-2008. American Experience. Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), Arlington, Virginia, USA Accessed February, 13, 2009. Available at [http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carter/peopleevents/e\\_hostage.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carter/peopleevents/e_hostage.html).

Several factions supported the Islamic Revolution in Iran. One faction consisted of the disenfranchised modern middle class such as lawyers, students, and white-collar workers. Evand Abrahamian, a professor at the City University of New York Graduate Center, stated, “[t]he early visible opposition by liberals was based in the urban middle class, a section of the population that was fairly secular and wanted the Shah to adhere to the Iranian Constitution of 1906, not a republic ruled by Islamic clerics.”<sup>17</sup> The second faction consisted of the Islamic clergy under the control of the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini of whom Sandra Mackey, an award-winning writer on Middle Eastern culture and politics wrote, “[t]he clergy were divided, some allying with the liberal secularists, and others with the Marxists and Communists.”<sup>18</sup> In addition to these two factions, there were other anti-Shah groups, which operated throughout Europe and provided material and moral support to dissidents within Iran.

Once President Carter withdrew the United States’ support, these anti-Shah factions in Iran grew increasingly bolder and more violent, and with the first of four attacks on the United States Embassy in Iran, the Shah began to plan his exit strategy and looked for countries in which he could seek asylum. The United States refused to grant asylum to the Shah. “On September 27, [the Secretary of State, Cyrus] Vance said publically that ‘we have had to take into account the possible dangers to American people (in Iran) at this time’ and therefore the Shah’s admission would not be in the U.S. national interest.”<sup>19</sup> Over the next several months, the Shah moved from country to country, each time staying for a few days or a few weeks until diplomatic pressure and lack of asylum forced him to move again. It was during this time that the Shah also began battling lymphoma.

In October 1979, his attending American doctor decided that the Shah was in critical condition and his only chance of survival would be in a United States hospital. For that reason, President Carter

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<sup>17</sup> Evand Abrahamian. *Iran; Between Two Revolutions*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982). 502-503.

<sup>18</sup> Sandra Mackey. *The Iranians: Persia, Islam and the Soul of a Nation*. (New York: Penguin Group) 1998). 276.

<sup>19</sup> Boyd. *A King's Exile*. 7.

eventually agreed to grant asylum. Carter was concerned of the reaction of Iran towards the United States' granting of asylum to the Shah. When he asked what was the threat was to the United States Embassy because of the previous attacks, his aides assured him that nothing would happen. However, the American Embassy staff in Iran saw this as a major mistake and in the view of William J. Daugherty, an Associate Professor of Government, Armstrong Atlantic State University and former CIA officer:

From the perspective of the embassy staff, it was absolutely the worst thing that could happen, on two fronts: the decision would undo the progress, however slight, in improving United States-Iranian relations; and it would jeopardize the safety and security of all Americans in Iran. The embassy staff was utterly astonished, for not only had they warned Washington over the previous summer of the various dangers associated with such a decision, but some had even been told that by Washington seniors that the consequences of the Shah's admission to the United States were so obvious that no one would be "dumb enough" to allow it.<sup>20</sup>

This lack of refusal to acknowledge key information from experienced subordinates would cause a somewhat stable situation with Iran to spiral out of control when President Carter allowed the Shah to enter the United States for medical treatment.

When the Shah arrived in the United States for medical treatment, tensions between United States and Iran further escalated and culminated with militant Islamic students attacking the United States Embassy in Iran and subsequently taking the United States Embassy personnel hostage. "The Shah's arrival in New York on medical grounds was 'like a fuel rod entering an atomic core'--- it initiated a powerful chain reaction with domestic and international reverberations."<sup>21</sup> The students' demands were simple; the hostages would be released in exchange for the Shah's return to Iran for trial and a United States apology for interfering in Iranian affairs. The United States and the world saw the Embassy hostage taking as a breach of international law and ethics and as a result, President Carter took action against Iran. "On November 14, Carter issued an executive order under the International Emergency Economic Power

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<sup>20</sup> William J. Daugherty. 1996. American Diplomacy. (American Diplomacy Publishers, Chapel Hill North Carolina, USA. Accessed February 14, 2009.) Available at [http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives\\_roll/2003\\_01-03/dauherty\\_shah/dauherty\\_p2.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/diplomat/archives_roll/2003_01-03/dauherty_shah/dauherty_p2.html)

<sup>21</sup> Boyd. A King's Exile. 9.

Act of 1977, blocking all property and interests in the government of Iran and the Central Bank of Iran. The order did not cover privately owned assets of the Shah and his family.”<sup>22</sup> Once the Shah was well enough to travel, he was forced by the Carter administration to leave the United States and would eventually travel to Egypt. The Shah never recovered from his cancer and died in a military hospital outside of Cairo on July 28, 1980. In the end, the seizing of the United States Embassy in Iran contributed to President Carter not being reelected. On January 20, 1981, the day that President Ronald Reagan was inaugurated, the last of the United States Embassy hostages would be freed and returned to the United States. Because of President Carter’s actions, the two nations’ goals would diverge and a semi-stable peace in the Middle East would be shattered. The implications of the Shah’s abdication and exile would shape and affect Western and Middle Eastern relations for years to come.

## **The Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States**

When President Reagan was inaugurated in 1981, there was a change of thought on United States’ stand on Iran. The Reagan Administration’s primary focus was deterring the Soviet Union, so keeping Iran in check became an economy of force operation. This was accomplished by supporting Iraq in its war against Iran. According to Anoushiravan Ehteshami, a professor of international relations at the University of Durham and vice president of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies:

The United States fear of the Iranian revolution caused a change in United States policy toward the war in 1980.... Washington tightened its sanctions regime on Iran while slowly shifting its weight behind Baghdad. Iraq’s Gulf Arab backers feared the growing influence of the Iranian revolution and saw Iraq as the first line of defense against revolutionary Iran, further encouraging the United States shift toward Iraq and the other Arab states.<sup>23</sup>

Iraq, under President Saddam Hussein, invaded Iran on September 22, 1980, in order to expand Iraqi access to the Persian Gulf. Even though there was evidence that Iraq was using chemical weapons in Iran,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>23</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami. "Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam." (*The Washington Quarterly*, 2003). 118.

the Reagan Administration still chose to help Iraq in its fight against Iran. This support to Iraqi consisted primarily of military equipment sales and intelligence updates on Iranian troop movements.

A major issue of the Reagan Administration regarding Iran was the Iran-Contra Affair. In 1986, members of the Reagan Administration assisted in obtaining spare parts for the United States military equipment that the Shah's government had purchased which was now falling apart due to Iran being barred from receiving aid. In exchange for this facilitation in the sale of spare parts, Iran facilitated the freeing of American hostages held in Lebanon by Iranian backed terrorist. "The only United States support for Iran during the Iran-Iraq War came during the Iran-Contra Affair of 1986–1987, when the United States covertly supplied Iran with badly needed war material (HAWK missiles, TOW antitank missiles, and spare weapons parts) in exchange for the freedom of United States citizens held hostage in Lebanon."<sup>24</sup> The Reagan Administration then used the profits from these arms and equipment sales to fund anti-Communist rebels, the Contras, in Nicaragua, which Congress had voted not to support. These events led to a political scandal in 1987 and 1988 known as the Iran-Contra Affair. The scandal called into questioning the idea that the United States does not negotiate with terrorists. There was a loss of face for the United States in general, and a victory for Iran both from the aid they received, and from the prestige that they gained by manipulating the United States.

In 1988, with the election of President George H.W. Bush, there would be almost no change in the United States' stance towards Iran. President Bush had to deal with the aftereffects of the Iran Contra Affair and pardoned key members of the Reagan Administration who had been indicted. Although Iran played only a minor role in the United States' policies, the Bush Administration did oversee the United States led coalition that responded to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. That coalition would defeat Iraq and freed Kuwait in 1991. Not only was there the prestige gained by the United States for forming and leading a Western and Arab Coalition but the alliances that were formed between the United States,

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<sup>24</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami. "Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam." 118.

Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia would allow for a continued United States presence in the region for more than a decade.

After the election of President William J. Clinton in 1992, there would be a slow lowering of trade sanctions against Iran. However, in April 1995, due to an Israeli sponsored a rash of anti-Iranian sentiment in the United States government; he reversed his stance and imposed even stricter sanctions. In 1996, Congress passed the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act, which financially threatened non-United States aligned countries making large investments with Iran. In his testimony to Congress, Kenneth Katzman, a specialist in Middle East affairs for the Congressional Research Service, stated:

In response to Iran's stepped up nuclear program and its support to terrorist organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and Palestine Islamic Jihad, President Clinton issued Executive Order 12959 (May 6, 1995), banning United States trade and investment with Iran. The rationale was that these sanctions would curb the strategic threat from Iran by hindering its ability to modernize its key petroleum sector, which generates about 20% of Iran's GDP.<sup>25</sup>

Although the European Union denounced the act, as invalid it still blocked some needed financial investments for Iran. Also during the 1990s, there was a gradual lessening of religious control in Iran. In 1997, with the election of a moderate Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami, there was a resurgence of hope in both countries that Iran and the United States could heal their wounds and mutual distrust. Relations did not improve further though, as Iran's conservatives opposed the United States in principle, and the United States was unwilling to change its stance that Iran had to make concessions, which included changes in Iranian policy on Israel, nuclear energy, and support for terrorism.

Within eight months of President George W. Bush assuming the presidency in 2001, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks stunned the world. The reaction of Iran's common people was one of extreme sympathy and outrage over the loss of life and devastation. Afshin Molavi, a fellow at the New American Foundation, wrote that, "[a]fter the September 11 attacks, a large, spontaneous candlelight vigil took place in Tehran, where the thousands gathered shouted 'Down with terrorists.' Nearly three-fourths

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<sup>25</sup> Kenneth Katzman. "The Iran Sanctions Act (ISA)". (Washington D.C.: The Library Congress, 2007). 1.

of the Iranians polled in a 2002 survey said they would like their government to restore dialogue with the United States.”<sup>26</sup> While the Iranian people were outraged, the official Iranian stance towards the United States was one of quiet observation to see how the United States government would react. When the United States invasion of Afghanistan began, Iran took steps to protect its security by securing its border with Afghanistan in order to control refugee flow and prevent undesirable elements from entering Iran. Other than that action, Iran did not assist the United States in implementing regime change in Afghanistan.

Then, on January 29, 2002, during his State of the Union address, President Bush described Iran, along with North Korea and Saddam Hussein's Iraq, as an "Axis of Evil." Takeyh wrote:

Bush declared Iran a “major sponsor of terrorism,” and once more condemned the “unelected few” who suppress a restive populace. The incendiary language was a palpable threat. The United States of America, Bush proclaimed, “would not permit the world’s most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world’s most dangerous weapons.” In the post-September 11 and post-Afghanistan atmosphere, this was not an idle threat. Iran was once more in America’s crosshairs.<sup>27</sup>

Even after this speech, Iran’s reformist government remained cautious about antagonizing the United States. In fact, in 2003, prior to the invasion of Iraq, Iran approached the United States through intermediaries, with a “Grand Bargain” of peace. This document consisted of Iranian concessions that included offers to help the United States stabilize Iraq after the invasion and an offer to disarm Hezbollah and turn it into a political organization. According to *PBS Frontline*:

The content of the document, essentially, (was) an agenda for a diplomatic process to resolve all of the outstanding bilateral differences between the United States and Iran. On the Iranian side, they acknowledged that they would need to be prepared to deal with our concerns about their WMD activities, their links to terrorist groups like Hezbollah and Hamas, and they said in there that they would be prepared to eliminate military support

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<sup>26</sup> Afshin Molavi. "A New Day in Iran." (*Smithonian Magazine*, March 1, 2005). 1.

<sup>27</sup> Ray Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*.128-129.

for these organizations and to work to turn Hezbollah, for example, into a purely political and social organization in Lebanon.<sup>28</sup>

The Bush Administration, after reviewing the document, turned down this overture from Iran and did not even acknowledge that it had even been made. Trita Parsi, the founder and president of the National Iranian American Council wrote, “it was Cheney and Rumsfeld who made sure that Washington dismissed Iran's May 2003 offer to open up its nuclear program, rein in Hezbollah and cooperate against al-Qaeda.”<sup>29</sup> This quote was attributed to Lawrence Wilkerson, a retired United States Army Colonel and the Chief of Staff to Former Secretary of State Colin Powell. Wilkerson, in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation, stated, “We thought it was a very propitious moment... But as soon as it got to the White House, and as soon as it got to the vice president's office, the old mantra of 'We don't talk to evil' ... reasserted itself.”<sup>30</sup> With this refusal, the United States and Iran lost a window of opportunity to improve relations. By 2003, when the United States invaded Iraq, Iranian political control had shifted away from the reformers and pro-Westerners and towards hard-liners who supported conflict with the West. With the return of Iranian religious conservatives, the balance had again shifted to the 1980s status quo of hatred and distrust between the United States and Iran.

The United States government failed to be consistent in its dealing with Iran and as a result, made several mistakes that have misshaped national policy for the past thirty years. This began when President Carter's idealism leading to the cutting of ties with the Shah and his government over the protest of key leaders in the United States government. The new Iranian government further inflamed the situation when it protested the Shah being allowed to enter the United States after he had gone into exile and encouraged

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<sup>28</sup> Greg Barker. October 23, 2007. Showdown with Iran. (PBS Frontline, Boston, Massachusetts, USA. Accessed February 20, 2009). Available at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/showdown/themes/grandbargain.html>

<sup>29</sup> Trita Parsi . November 11, 2006. (Asia Times Online. Hong Kong, PRC. Accessed March 10, 2009). Available at [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle\\_East/HK11Ak04.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/HK11Ak04.html).

<sup>30</sup> Lawrence Wilkerson. January 18, 2007. BBC News. British Broadcasting Corporation, London, UK. Accessed April 22, 2009. Available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6274147.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6274147.stm)

the seizure of the United States Embassy. Next was the Reagan Administrations' ineptness in the Iran-Contra Affair, which entailed the selling of weapons to Iran in exchange for freeing American hostages held in Lebanon by Iranian backed terrorist and then using the profits to fund the Contras in Nicaragua. Lastly, there was President Bush's refusal of the substantial concessions that the Iranian Government offered in exchange for a relative stability in the region in the aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks.

## **The United States' Interests in the Middle East and Iran**

What are the United States' interests in Iran in particular and in the Middle East as a whole? To best answer this question, one has to see how the United States and its interest in the Middle East ties into its interest in Iran. Another way to look at the situation is to view how the United States interest in Iran at the micro level nests with the United States interest in the Middle East at the macro level. Secretary Burns referred to this theme with the Middle East and Iran in his congressional testimony:

We face a complex, interconnected set of four crises in the Middle East: the need to achieve a stable and more peaceful Iraq; to strengthen the democratically elected government of Lebanon against Iran's, Syria's, and Hezbollah's attempt to unseat it; to block Iran's nuclear and regional ambitions; and to establish the foundations for peace between the Israeli and the Palestinian people. The Middle East is now the region of greatest importance for the U.S. worldwide, and our critical interests are engaged in all of these areas. But beyond our responsibility to help stabilize Iraq, nothing is more vital to the future of America's role in the Middle East than addressing the challenges posed by the radical regime in Iran.<sup>31</sup>

Iran at the micro level is a specific threat to the United States is closely entwined with the United States' focus in the Middle East in general at the macro level.

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<sup>31</sup> Burns. "United States Policy Towards Iran". 3.

## The United States and the Middle East

At the macro level, the United States views the Middle East in many ways but probably has the greatest interest in six areas: deterring terrorism, deterring weapons of mass destruction proliferation, ensuring that there are stable oil supplies and prices, ensuring the stability of allies in the region, ensuring Israel's survivability, and promoting democracy and human rights in the region. In 2003, The Rand Corporation put together a report that focused on these areas, entitled *Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability, and Political Change*, of which the purpose was to examine:

Emerging security trends that will shape the Persian Gulf in the coming years. The authors address a number of topics that will affect regional security, including prospects for economic and political reform, civil-military relations, regime change, energy security, the spread of new information technologies, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>32</sup>

Taken together, these six focus areas are seen by the Rand Corporation to be critical to how the United States views the Middle East.

Although deterring terrorism in general has been a concern for the United States for the past forty years, it was not until September 11, 2001, that it became the United States government's primary concern in the Middle East. The Rand Corporation's study acknowledged this concern as well, stating, "[a]fter the devastating September 11, 2001, attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the suppression of terrorism rose to the fore of United States concerns in the Middle East."<sup>33</sup> Not only does the United States try to deter terrorism directed towards itself but also towards its allies as well. One of the interests of radical Islamist groups such as Al Qaeda is combating the United States and the governments of Islamic nations that are allied with the United States. The Rand Corporation's study states, "much of their violence and propaganda is directed at destabilizing Middle Eastern regimes that are

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<sup>32</sup> The Rand Corporation. *Future Security Environment in the Middle East: Conflict, Stability, and Political Change*. (Santa Monica: The Rand Corporation, 2003). iii.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

friendly to the United States.”<sup>34</sup> As a result, stopping terrorism focused towards the United States and its Allies in the Middle East has been the driving international relations focus for the United States over the past eight years.

Nested with deterring terrorism is the next focus area, deterring Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) proliferation. One of the United States’ greatest fears is that terrorists will gain control of and use WMDs. According to Steve Bowman, a Specialist in National Defense, Foreign Affairs, and Trade Division of the State Department, “[w]orldwide, the likelihood of terrorists being capable of producing or obtaining WMD may be growing due to looser controls of stockpiles and technology in the former Soviet states specifically and the broader dissemination of related technology and information in general.”<sup>35</sup> In addition to terrorist organizations possessing WMDs, Middle Eastern countries that produce WMDs also pose a threat to the United States’ Arab allies, to Israel, and to the United States Armed Forces. According to the Rand Corporation’s study, “[a]dversaries employing WMDs might offset the vast superiority of United States conventional forces by enabling foes to inflict significant casualties on United States forces. As a result, they also threaten to undermine confidence in the United States’ security guarantee.”<sup>36</sup> Additionally the Rand Corporation’s study viewed threats in the area of WMDs in the Middle East, specifically in the countries of Iran and Syria, whose WMDs “are used as a strategic deterrent against Israel and, more generally, to compensate for the weaknesses of their conventional forces”.<sup>37</sup> The threat of WMDs in Iran specifically further reinforces the United States need to preserve Israel’s survival.

The United States is concerned about ensuring stable oil supplies and prices. This is especially so in the Persian Gulf region with its major oil reserves. Even though very little of the Middle East’s oil

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>35</sup> Steve Bowman. "Weapons of Mass Destruction: The Terrorist Threat". (Washington D.C.: United States Congress, 2002). 2.

<sup>36</sup> The Rand Corporation. *Future Security Environment in the Middle East* 3.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 3.

reserves are consumed by the United States, these reserves are extremely important to the United States' interests in that steady distribution and sales of those reserves to the world equates to economic stability. In 2001, British Petroleum (BP) Amoco estimated that ,“Saudi Arabia alone contains a quarter of the world's total proven reserves; Iraq has the second largest reserves in the world, possessing more than 10 percent of the world's total; and Iran, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Kuwait contain about 9 percent each.”<sup>38</sup> In fact, Iraq has the ability to increase its production two or three fold by the end of 2010, with substantial foreign support, most likely from China. During the next ten years, the counties of the Persian Gulf will still be among the most important oil controllers and power brokers in the region with the caveat that oil prices remain strong for them to exercise that power and control. Unfortunately, few countries have moral integrity, military capability, or the will to see that this that power and control is ensured, so the United States must take the lead in ensuring stable oil supplies and prices.

Focusing on the stability of allies in the region, the United States has greatly expanded its role in the Middle East. The long-standing ties of over sixty years with Israel area key to the United States' Middle East policy. Until 1979, the United States also had influence in Iran but with the Islamic Revolution and the resulting severing of ties, the United States was forced to turn to other Middle Eastern countries, which in the past were reluctant to have an alliance with the United States due to its ties with Israel. A change was strengthened because of the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War. Now, the United States maintains strong military defense and support ties with Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and other Persian Gulf Arab States. The Rand Corporation's states that, “[a]lthough these states' possession of, or proximity to, large oil reserves was the initial reason for U.S. efforts to build ties, these relations have taken on a life of their own. The United States also has tried to cultivate Jordan, Egypt, and Morocco as moderate Arab voices that are willing to cooperate with the United States on counterterrorism and support the U.S. agenda on a range of issues.”<sup>39</sup> Without the United States' focus on stabilizing its allies in the region,

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<sup>38</sup> BP Amoco. *BP Amoco Statistical Review of World Energy*. (London: BP Amoco, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> The Rand Corporation. *Future Security Environment in the Middle East*. 4.

there can conceivably be a growth in distrust and a lack of common goals and cooperation between the West and the Middle East.

Key to the United States' interest in the Middle East is ensuring Israel's survivability. While not an oil producing state, Israel is an emotional investment for the United States. "Many Americans also strongly back Israel, making its security an important political issue for any administration. Continued violence in Israel and Palestinian areas has contributed to anti-U.S. sentiment throughout the region and made it more difficult for friendly Arab and Muslim governments to cooperate openly with Washington on a host of issues."<sup>40</sup> The ongoing Israeli and Palestinian conflict over land in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has caused considerable backlash towards the United States in the Middle East because of the United States' relationship with Israel. Because of that backlash, a lack of cooperation between the majority of Middle Eastern countries and the United States on economic and security issues has often caused difficulties over the years. To counter that trend, the Rand Corporation study noted, "[t]he Bush Administration has put forth a road map toward a permanent two-state solution and is working with Russia, the European Union, and the United Nations to persuade the parties to adhere to its provisions; yet the violence continues. The United States has an interest in reducing the level of violence in the short to medium term and helping to find a sustainable long-term solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict."<sup>41</sup> For all the problems that Israel causes the United States, the one democratic, pro-Western country serves as a trusted ally in an extremely volatile region. Israel's value in combating terrorism and responding to military threats in the region, such as with the destruction of the Syrian nuclear project in 2008, has made it vital to the United States' strategy in the region.

The United States has maintained an interest since the 1960s in promoting democracy and human rights. The United States views its interaction with the non-democratic countries of the Middle East as something that has far-reaching implications. Although Israel and Lebanon are the only democratic states

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 5.

in the Middle East, there are few if any critical remarks about the lack of democracy and human rights made against the other countries in the region from United States. According to John Alterman, the Director and Senior Fellow of the Middle East Program, Center for Strategic and International Studies, “American officials have tended to accede to official requests to downplay calls for democratization and to shun extensive contacts with those working against the ruling governments.”<sup>42</sup> As a result, even the most liberally minded individual in the Middle East views the United States and its support for democracy and human rights with skepticism. Richard W. Murphy, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, and F. Gregory Gause III, an assistant professor at the University of Vermont, state, “[t]here is a pervasive sense in the Middle East that the United States does not support democracy in the region, but rather supports what is in its strategic interest and calls it democratic.”<sup>43</sup> In the end, this makes sense, because the United States cannot afford to become embroiled in forcing democracy on most of the Middle East: it is simply too great a task for such a diverse region.

## **The United States and Iran**

With those Middle Eastern issues in mind, the United States is focusing its efforts towards Iran at the micro level in three areas that were illustrated repeatedly in multiple government sources. For the purpose of this study, Secretary Burns’ Congressional testimony and the Rand Corporation’s study will continue to provide the primary source for the United States’ efforts towards Iran. The areas of focus include; prevention of Iranian influences in destabilizing democratic based Middle East governments, the halting of support to Iranian backed extremist Muslim organizations, and countering Iran’s quest to become a nuclear power. The first two, influences and backing of extremist organizations, are closely intertwined.

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<sup>42</sup> Jon B Alterman. "The Gulf States and the American Umbrella." (*Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 2000). 10.

<sup>43</sup> Richard W. Murphy and F. Gregory Gause III. "Democracy and U.S. Policy in the Muslim Middle East." (*Middle East Policy*, 1997). 59.

In regards to the prevention of Iranian influence in destabilizing Middle Eastern democracies, the United States is focusing its efforts primarily on three countries, Israel, Iraq, and Lebanon. For Iraq, that means the stabilization of the emergent and developing Iraqi democratic system with minimal Iranian interference. The United States tries to block Iran from supplying financial aid to Iraqi Shiite groups that allows Iran to obtain greater influence and power within Iraq. “A functioning and legitimate Iraq state would be equipped to neutralize the insurgency, sap the Ba’athists of their remaining power, and incorporate moderate Sunnis into an inclusive governing order.”<sup>44</sup> For Lebanon, the United States seeks to protect Lebanon’s democratic government from Iranian influences. To do this, the United States provides financial and humanitarian aid to help Lebanon recover from its civil war and the occupation by Israel. “In essence, it was not the revolutionary sermons and Islamist calls but the reality of conflict between Israel and its neighbors that allowed an opportunistic Iran to assert its influences beyond its borders at a limited cost.”<sup>45</sup> Closely tied with Lebanon is the Iranian support of the Palestinian cause that negatively influences the Israeli and Palestinian peace process.

The United States’ focus on halting support to Iranian backed extremist Muslim organizations ties in with Iran’s efforts to destabilize the democratic Middle Eastern counties. These same groups have also targeted Western interests around the world as well. In his testimony to the House of Representatives, Matthew A. Levitt, Senior Fellow and Director of Terrorism Studies for the Washington Institute for Near East Policy stated, “Hezbollah, a United States-designated terrorist organization, was responsible for more American deaths than any other terrorist organization until September 11.”<sup>46</sup> Iran has used Shiite militias to target innocent Iraqis and Coalition forces. In addition, Iran’s support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and Israel continues to destabilize that region. In Secretary Burns’ Congressional testimony, he stated that:

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<sup>44</sup> Ray Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*. 223-224.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>46</sup> Matthew A Levitt. “Iranian State Sponsorship of Terror:Threatening U.S. Security, Global Stability, and Regional Peace”. (Washington D.C.: Committee on International Relations, 2005). 2.

Tehran has long been the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism; the regime sponsored and was responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans in the 1980s and 1990s. Through its efforts to rearm Hezbollah, the Iranian regime has violated its obligations under UNSCR 1701 and it has violated UNSCR 1267.<sup>47</sup>

Iran also provides monetary and material aid to other extremist groups throughout the Middle East. As a result, the United States sees Iran as a central financier of terrorist extremist and the United States Departments of State and the Treasury are working with other international agencies in an effort to deny Iranian backed individuals and groups' access to the world financial system. Additionally, the United States continues to maintain and strengthen its security programs with its Middle Eastern allies.

The United States focus on countering Iran's quest to become a nuclear power is actually the easiest of all to deal with. This is a common interest between the United States and other countries.

Diplomacy and economic sanctions are the cornerstones to this plan. As Secretary Burns stated:

We are responding to the challenge of a nuclear-armed Iran with a comprehensive strategy that relies on American diplomatic leadership and the creation over the last two years of a robust multilateral coalition. First and foremost, we have made clear to the Iranian regime that its provocative and destabilizing policies will entail painful costs, including financial hardship, diplomatic isolation, and long-term detriment to Iran's prestige and fundamental national interests. Secondly, and equally important, we have worked to alter the regime's actions and behavior and convince it that another, more constructive course is available to it.<sup>48</sup>

Burn's statement clarifies that military action is the last thing the United States wants to use to stop Iran's nuclear aspirations.

Looking at the focus of effort of the United States and its interest in the Middle East at the macro level and the focus of effort of the United States and its interest in Iran at the micro level, the United States focus areas in the Middle East and Iran are nested well. At the macro level, deterring terrorism, and deterring weapons of mass destruction proliferation are tied directly with the micro level of the cutting halting of support of Iranian backed extremist Muslim organizations, and the countering of Iran's quest to

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<sup>47</sup>Burns. "United States Policy Towards Iran". 21.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

become a nuclear power. Lastly, at macro level, the focus areas of ensuring the stability of allies in the region, and ensuring Israel's survivability, are tied at the micro level of the prevention of the various Iranian interests and influences towards the destabilization or overthrow of the governments of Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq.

## **Iran's Current Status and Goals**

Iran's current socio-economic situation reflects its history, its international relations stance, its political and social trends, and its economic issues. Together, these areas set the stage for Iran's current goals and interactions with the United States. Iran's current goals and interactions include the upsetting or influencing the democratic based Middle East governments of Iraq, Lebanon, and Israel, the supporting of extremist Muslim organizations, and the desire to become a nuclear power.

## **Iranian Historical Context**

Historically, Iranians regard themselves as Persians, not Arabs and the animosity between the two societies stretches back to 632 C.E. when raiders from the Arabian Peninsula attacked the Persians. Persia was eventually conquered by the Arabs, which paved the way for the Islamic domination of Persia in 652 C.E. Tareq Y Ismael, a professor of political science at the University of Calgary, and editor of the *International Journal of Contemporary Iraqi Studies*, wrote:

The rise of Islam in the seventh century led to the fall of Persia and its absorption into the Islamic Empire....The emergence of the Shiite- Sunni schism in the late seventh century was the first manifest sign for fragmentation of the empire. The conquest and consequent incorporation of the Middle East into the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century placed two empires as loggerheads in the Middle East, each seeking expansion at the expense of the other. (The Safawid Dynasty presented itself as the protector of the Shiites, while the Ottoman Empire claimed the role of the protector of the Sunnis.)<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Tareq Y Ismael. *Iraq and Iran; Roots of Conflict*. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1982.) 1.

Over the centuries, this struggle of empires continued, with Persian culture dominating Iran. Today, the Iranian people do not regard themselves as Arabs but as Persians, with over 89% Shiite Muslim and 9% Sunni Muslim.

Today, Iran is a blend of the old and new. Iran has a modernized infrastructure and society but is constrained from within by its traditional Islamic trappings as the world's only true theocracy. "After more than a quarter of a century in power, the Islamic Republic is at a crossroads as a new generation of stern conservatives has assumed power with a determination to return to the 'roots of the revolution.'"<sup>50</sup> Iran's strategic location in the region is vital because of its oil fields and that fact has continued to shape and strengthen it over the years to make it the regional power that it is today.

## **Iranian International Relations**

Because of its strategic location, Iran's foreign relations are focused towards its immediate neighbors and the Middle East region in different ways and priorities. According to Takeyh, "[t]he best manner of understanding Iran's regional policy is to envision three circles: the Persian Gulf, the Arab East (Egypt and North Africa), and Eurasia. The Persian Gulf would be most the most significant, while the Arab East and Eurasia would assume less importance."<sup>51</sup> Today, Iranian diplomacy within the Gulf has one overarching principle: friendship and developing extensive diplomatic contacts with its other Gulf countries. Yet despite this seemingly friendly attitude within the Gulf, Iran's focus towards the Arab East is not as congenial. Iran's hatred of Israel has continually offset the peaceful coexistence that Israel currently has with its neighbors Egypt and Jordan. Takeyh notes, "[t]he defining pillar of Iran's approach to this region has been its intense opposition to the state of Israel and the diplomatic efforts to normalize relations between the Jewish state and its neighbors."<sup>52</sup> As a result, other than the United States, Israel is

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<sup>50</sup> Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*. 2.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

the only other country with which Iran does not maintain diplomatic contact. In dealing with Eurasia, Iran has put aside its call for Muslim dominance for the practical realities, especially when dealing with Russia. As Takeyh points out, “in essence, the fears of being isolated in the international arena and having Afghan troubles seep over its borders have compelled Iran’s theoretical oligarchs to transcend their ideological exhortations and focus on achieving their practical objectives in the vast Eurasian landmass.”<sup>53</sup> Taken together, Iranian foreign policy for each region often confuses even the most politically astute individual.

## **Iranian Political and Social Stance**

Iran has had two leaders since the Islamic revolution, the ranking Grand Ayatollah, and the President of Iran. The Ayatollah represents the religious views of the country and is seen as the authority on religious law and its interpretation. In addition, the Grand Ayatollah provides the religious backing and legitimacy for the current government and the President of Iran. The President of Iran represents the political views of the country but he is not regarded as an independent power due to his being heavily influence by the Ayatollah. To give legitimate credibility to the Islamic Republic and in turn, the Iranian Legislature, there exists a limited suffrage, in which only the adult male population has the right to vote,

Today the Grand Ayatollah is Ali Khomeini, who has been the religious head of Iran since 1989. Although he was not considered the favorite successor to Ayatollah Khomeini, he quietly gathered power and upon his assumption of the position of Grand Ayatollah, he secured himself as the dominant religious authority in Iran. “At its core, Khomeini believes that the mission of the Islamic Republic is to uphold religious norms and resist popular attempts to alter the regime along democratic lines.”<sup>54</sup> His control of power allowed him to block liberal initiatives that would have shown a more moderate Iran to the region and the world.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>54</sup> Ray Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*. 34.

The current President of Iran is Mahmud Ahmadinejad. Initially, he served as a member of the revolutionary guard and was a supporter of the Islamic Revolution in the late 1970s, and was alleged to have been involved with the American hostage crisis during that period. He is a devoted religious literalist who believes in the return of the 12<sup>th</sup> Imam. Chuck Vollmer, an Advisory Board member for the Center for Strategic and International Studies, wrote, “‘We should define our economic, cultural, and political policies based on Imam Mahdi's return,’ states Ahmadinejad who has sacked Iran's most experienced foreign diplomats and numerous other public officials.”<sup>55</sup> According to Country Watch, an information provider that provides up-to-date news and information on each recognized country, that upon his election as the mayor of Teheran and prior to his election to President, “he shut down a number of the Western-style fast-food restaurants, removed Western-style advertising, and mandated Islamic-style beards and traditional garb for males. His candidacy for president was backed by the conservative clerical elite and mobilized in the country's mosques.”<sup>56</sup> However, for all his perceived political actions in supporting the Islamic revolution, Ahmadinejad is just the public face of Iranian leadership. The religious leadership truly runs Iran.

Today, there is an eroding connection between the people and the leaders of Iran due to a predominant desire of the common Iranian to gain Western styles and possessions. In addition, cultural isolationism has been reduced by Western ideals and values that can be easily accessed by the internet and other international communications modes. Molavi noted:

It is increasingly apparent that Iran's young are tuning out a preachy government for an alternative world of personal Web logs (Persian is the third most commonly used language on the Internet, after English and Chinese), private parties, movies, study, and dreams of emigrating to the West. These disenchanted “children of the revolution” make up the bulk of Iran's population, 70 percent of which is under 30. Too young to

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<sup>55</sup> Chuck Vollmer. "Iranian President Ahmadinejad, Islamic Eschatology, and Near-Term Implications." (*VII Inc.* Vienna, Virginia: VII Inc., 2006). 7.

<sup>56</sup> CountryWatch. 2009. Country Watch- Iran. (CountryWatch, Inc. Houston, Texas, USA. Accessed February 14, 2009). Available at [http://www.countrywatch.com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/cw\\_topic](http://www.countrywatch.com.lumen.cgsccarl.com/cw_topic)

remember the anti-American sentiment of the '70s, they share little of their parents' ideology.<sup>57</sup>

This is in direct conflict with the traditional Islamic beliefs that dominate Iran and the region. This aside, there is according to Country Watch, "a common sense of Iranian identity -- of patriotism and national pride -- that unites people in their belief that Iran should have the right to nuclear research and development, without interference from the West."<sup>58</sup> With the combination of national pride, and Western values, there is the potential for new changes to be brought forth by the common people of Iran if they can ever gain power.

## **Iranian Economical Issues**

Iran's current economy is a mixture of state ownership of oil and other large enterprises, village agriculture, and small-scale private trading and service ventures. For years, Iran's economy was destitute but that was changed at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to Berman:

A confluence of economic factors, ranging from the East Asian economic crisis to Russia's August 1998 fiscal meltdown, led to a sharp increase in world energy prices...This radical reversal helped to jump-start Teheran's military rearmament and to revive the Islamic Republic's regional ambitions.<sup>59</sup>

Since then, its economic infrastructure has been improving steadily but Iran continues to be affected by inflation and unemployment. Country Watch stated that:

Iran's economic performance remained strong in recent years supported by favorable oil market conditions and implementation of reforms for opening up the economy. However, the tensions associated with the nuclear issue has some adverse effects on private investment, and unemployment remained as high at 10.3 percent in 2005. Inflation has remained in double digits at around 15 percent in recent years owing to high government spending and rapid money growth.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Molavi. "A New Day in Iran." 2.

<sup>58</sup> CountyWatch- Iran.

<sup>59</sup> Berman. *Teheran Rising* 56.

<sup>60</sup> Country Watch- Iran.

Because of these figures and the country's diversified but small industrial base, the United Nations classifies Iran's economy as semi-developed. Today, with the impact spreading across the world from the current recession, Iran is remarkably stable due to its income from oil exports. However, that could change as oil prices drop, which could in turn affect Iran's influence in the region.

## Iranian Goals

With Iran's history, international relations, political and social trends, and economical status, and knowing the United States' focus on deterring Iran's ambitions, consider Iran's viewpoint. In this case, Iran's goals include the destabilizing of the democratic based Middle East governments of Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq, supporting extremist Muslim organizations, and the desire to possess nuclear weapons. As viewed from the United States standpoint, the first two areas, destabilizing of democratic based governments and backing of extremist organizations, are meshed together. Because of this meshing, they will be addressed together from Iran's perspective as well.

Iran's hatred towards Israel is largely based on three issues; the animosity from the treatment of the Palestinians by the Israelis, the loss of traditional Arab and Palestinian territory because of the formation of Israel, and the threat of Israel's suspected nuclear arsenal. To counter these three issues, Iran has allied itself with Syria. As Takeyh noted:

For the past two decades, Iran's persistent animosity towards Israel has coincided with Syria's quest to exert pressure on the Israeli's as a means of recovering lands lost in the 1967 war. However, while Iran's policy is driven by Islamic determination, Syria is propelled forward by cold strategic calculations. Tehran may view Hezbollah as a vanguard Islamic force struggling against the "Zionist entity" while For Damascus, the Lebanese militant party is just another mean of coercing Israel.<sup>61</sup>

Together, Iran and Syria each have an individual hatred for Israel. Syria's anger stems from the simple desire to recover its lands that were lost to Israel, while Iran looks for revenge for the abuses and

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<sup>61</sup> Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*. 71.

degradation of fellow Muslims at the hands of the Israelis. By forming an alliance with Syria, Iran will have the formal support from another country to achieve its goals.

In 1982, Israel invaded Lebanon in order to protect itself from the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), which was using Lebanon as a sanctuary to stage attacks into Israel. Iran became embroiled in the conflict by supporting the PLO and the resident Lebanese Shiite population. Iran's goal was to unite disparate Shiite groups and turn them towards common enemies- the Lebanese Christians and the Israelis. "The Shiites constituted the largest communal group in Lebanon but were traditionally excluded from positions of political and economic importance."<sup>62</sup> These Lebanese Shiites, under the guidance of Iran, eventually morphed into the organization of Hezbollah. Additionally, "Iran's strategy in Lebanon was to dispatch economic and financial assistance to win Shiite hearts and minds while making certain that its Shiite allies had sufficient military hardware for a potential clash with their rivals."<sup>63</sup> With this support, Hezbollah grew in strength and eventually became a power in Lebanese politics. Even after the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon, Iran continued to support the Shiite Muslims in Lebanon. The Rand Corporation study noted that, "[o]ver time, Tehran's ardor has waned, but it still supports anti-Israeli groups such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and the Palestine Islamic Jihad."<sup>64</sup> This successful support was also the model that Iran used in influencing the insurgency against the United States in Iraq.

With the United States supporting a democratic Iraqi government just across the western border of Iran, the Iranians perceived a threat to their sovereignty. This perceived threat gives Iran an excuse to support their fellow Shiites in Iraq in their fight to force the United States and its coalition partners out of Iraq. Ehteshami wrote that:

Some elements in Iran will point to United States behavior in Iraq—the apparent renewed support for the Iraq-based anti-Tehran Mujahideen-e Khalq organization, the imposition of a United States political model on a Muslim state, the establishment of military bases, and the control of Iraq's oil wealth—as well as the expansion of military facilities in the

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>64</sup> The Rand Corporation. *Future Security Environment in the Middle East*. 3.

small Gulf Arab states of Bahrain and Qatar and the perceived encirclement of Iran through an elaborate network of alliances— as justification to encourage some Iraqi Shiite forces to assist Tehran in extending its power in Iraq by infiltrating the emerging post-Ba’thist polity.<sup>65</sup>

From 2005 to 2007, Iran and the United States were in almost in open conflict over control of Iraq.

Richard Engel, NBC News's Chief Foreign Correspondent, states, “Iran is supporting insurgents in Iraq in order to keep American troops bogged down and incapable of attacking Iran, while simultaneously expanding its influence over the holy Shiite cities of Najaf and Karbala, the Shaat al-Arb waterway and the Persian Gulf.”<sup>66</sup> Although the United States and its Iraqi partners have for the most part controlled the alliances between Iraqi Shiites and Iran, some elements are still present today.

Iran’s quest to possess nuclear weapons emanates from its desire to defend itself against an overwhelming Western, Israeli, or even Sunni Arab domination. “Iran’s quest for nuclear weapons does not stem from irrational ideological postulations, but from a judicious attempt to craft a viable deterrence posture against a range of threats.”<sup>67</sup> They are surrounded by the United States’ presence in Afghanistan in the east and Iraq in the west. Additionally, the United States has formed friendships with Sunni dominated Saudi Arabia and the other Persian Gulf based Arab countries in the south and Azerbaijan and Turkey in the north. Although the United States’ strategy of containment is a failure, Iran still sees these United States’ allies around it as a threat. The desire to have nuclear weapons is manifested not in Islamic extremism, as is predominantly believed in the West, but rather as means of countering a threat. Takeyh wrote, “[h]istorically, the need to negate the American and Iraqi threats has been the primary motivation for Iran’s policymakers. In more recent times, the simmering concerns regarding the stability of a nuclear-

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<sup>65</sup> Anoushiravan Ehteshami. "Iran-Iraq Relations after Saddam." 125-126.

<sup>66</sup> Richard Engel. 2007. *The Fight for Iraq: a Regional Powerplay*. (NBC, New York, New York, USA. Accessed 29 September 2008). Available at <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17722026>

<sup>67</sup> Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*. 140.

armed Pakistan have similarly enhanced the value of such weapons to Iran's planners."<sup>68</sup> It is only natural that Iran would desire to defend itself against these enemies and threats to its sovereignty.

The Iranian quest to build a nuclear weapon dates back to the Shah's regime, but over the years, it has been blocked and slowed by the West. However, in the aftermath of the 9-11 terrorist attacks, Iran's nuclear program has become the subject of contention with the West because of suspicions regarding Iran's military intentions. Berman notes, "[s]ince then, a series of discoveries by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) - ranging from advanced clandestine nuclear development to the presence of trace weapons-grade uranium- and reluctant disclosures by Iranian officials themselves, have unearthed an atomic endeavor dramatically broader and more mature than originally believed."<sup>69</sup> In a report entitled "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities," the National Intelligence Counsel stated:

We judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program; we also assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop possess nuclear weapons. We judge with high confidence that the halt, and Tehran's announcement of its decision to suspend its declared uranium enrichment program and sign an Additional Protocol to its Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty Safeguards Agreement, was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work.<sup>70</sup>

This has led the United Nations Security Council to impose sanctions against Iran, thus furthering Iran's economic isolation.

Iran, in its current view of its position in the Middle East, uses the conflict Sunni Muslims vs. Shiite Muslims to further its goal of regional domination. Added to that is the existence of the Jewish state, which forced Palestinians from their ancestral lands. The threat of being surrounded by the United States and its allies further focuses Iran's hatred and fear. Yet Iran's strategy is to remain a dominant power in the region. Iran's current religious and political leaders are true believers of the Islamic

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 140-141.

<sup>69</sup> Berman. *Teheran Rising*. 32.

<sup>70</sup> National Intelligence Council. "Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities". (Washington D.C.: National Intelligence Council, 2007). 6.

Revolution. They are trying to impose their will on a changing population that is undergoing increasing economic hardships and a reduction of basic human freedoms. Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's National Security Adviser, and Robert M. Gates, the former Director of Central Intelligence wrote that, "Iran's theocratic system is deeply unpopular with its citizenry. In their own media as well as in dialogue with external interlocutors, many Iranians—across a wide spectrum of age, class, and ethnic and religious backgrounds—are candid and scathing in their criticism of their government and its policies."<sup>71</sup> Though the common Iranian does not have the power to take control yet, they are growing stronger with each day and as a result, internal change in Iran may come in the future.

## **A Possible Solution**

### **Using Globalization and DIME as a Solution**

After viewing the history of friendship and conflict between the United States and Iran, and seeing the current goals and interests of these two countries, a possible conclusion is that both countries need to put aside their hatreds and fears of one another and come to an agreement of mutual understanding that is beneficial to both. Ray Takeyh and Nikolas K. Gvosdev, a professor of national-security studies at the U.S. Naval War College stated:

Iran under the mullahs and the United States will never be close friends, much less allies. Gambling vital U.S. interests on waiting years for regime change, however, is a risky strategy. The Islamic Republic is not a simple rouge regime like Saddam's Iraq or Kim Jong Il's North Korea; it is a complex state prepared to reach a *modus vivendi* with its neighbors and with the United States. The best way to tie Iran to the existing status quo in the region and provide it with incentives to restrain its revolutionary impulses voluntarily is through a policy of sustained security dialogue and economic ties. For the first time in more than 20 years, the United States has the opportunity to deal with rational, pragmatic interlocutors who, by virtue of their standing in the government, are in a position to negotiate. It is an opportunity that should not be squandered.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski and Robert M. Gates. "Iran: Time for a New Approach". (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2004). 12.

<sup>72</sup> Nikolas K Gvosdev and Ray Takeyh. "Pragmatism in the Midst of Iranian Turmoil." (*The Washington Quarterly*, 2004). 52-53.

To take advantage of that opportunity, the United States, the West, and the Sunni dominated countries of the Persian Gulf Region, need to use the favorable aspects of Globalization along with the Elements of National Power, i.e. Diplomatic, Informational, Military, and Economic (DIME). Together, Globalization and the DIME will help reverse the current failed stance of containment that the West and the United States have adopted and will help in establishing a favorable change to Iran's current trend of regionally destabilizing aspirations.

Iran is attempting to become a more powerful player in the region and in the world through several means. The areas in which the United States and its allies need to focus on countering Iran include the destabilization of the democratic based Middle East governments of Lebanon, Israel, and Iraq, the supporting of extremist Muslim organizations, and the attempt to become a nuclear power. If Iran becomes successful in any of these three areas, it will help them gain more control of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East, thus affecting the other Gulf States, Lebanon, and Israel. This will destabilize the balance of conflict between Shiite vs. and Sunni and make Iran an even greater regional power to contend.

## **Iran's Nuclear Program**

Iran has a great interest in continuing its nuclear program, which is both energy and weapons based. Having a viable nuclear energy program will help economic growth in Iran by providing readily accessed power. In addition, having a viable nuclear energy program will deter Iran from using its oil resources, which influences Iran's oil exports by siphoning from one of the few valuable assets it possesses. With the acquisition of a successful nuclear weapons program, Iran will be able to join the world's "Nuclear Club" and being a member of that "Club" will help Iran at the bargaining table with the stronger Western powers that have greater economic and military strength. A drawback of Iran having a viable nuclear program is the threat of providing WMDs for radical Islamic factions that Iran supports.

Country Watch noted:

Bolstered with popular backing for its nuclear plans, it is unlikely that Iran will be easily cowed into submission by international pressure. With Europe, led by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, recommending action in the form of sanctions by the United Nations Security Council, the matter is sure to become increasingly complex. In anticipation of such a threat, Iran has warned that the imposition of economic sanctions would result in higher oil prices. As a result, there was increasing anxiety about the possible repercussions on the global oil market.<sup>73</sup>

However, Iran has halted its formal nuclear weapons development program since the fall of 2003 under international pressure but is continuing to enrich uranium, which means it may still be able to develop a weapon between 2010 and 2015. "In a further development, Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad has said that he was considering withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NNPT). If Iran moves forward with this measure, it will join North Korea to form a duet of countries which have abandoned the NNPT and resumed nuclear development in recent years."<sup>74</sup> This declaration further enflames the confrontation with the United States and its desire to control WMDs

To encourage the halting of its nuclear weapons research, the United States and the other Western countries along with the Sunni countries of the Gulf need to band together and focus their effort towards regulating Iranian nuclear research. This can be accomplished by providing positive support with monetary aid, facilities, and personnel that will guide Iran towards research in nuclear power generation and not towards nuclear weapons. Takeyh and Nasr wrote that:

Engaging Iran while regulating its rising power within an inclusive regional security arrangement is the best way of stabilizing Iraq, placating the United States' Arab allies, helping along the Arab-Israeli peace process, and even giving a new direction to negotiations over Iran's nuclear program. Because this approach includes all the relevant players, it is also the most suitable and the least taxing strategy for the United States in the Middle East.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Country Watch- Iran.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Takeyh and Nasr. "The Costs of Containing Iran". 94.

Another means to help is the lifting of economic sanctions on Iran. This will strengthen an already lagging Iranian economy and lower their national deficit. This in turn will promote internal economic growth and raise the standard of living for the Iranian people. Key points of the DIME are the Diplomatic and Economic aspects.

## Iran in Iraq

The focus of Iran on the destabilization of the democratic based government of Lebanon is important in that Iran is providing political and military support to the Shiite populations in southern Iraq. The Shiites in Iran and Iraq see each other as historical allies, a common people, and that commonality is a logical stepping-stone towards uniting an already volatile region. Iran and Iraq have often discussed being allies with each other in the past but have never carried through with the act. A diplomatic note from the Iraqi Ba'athists government to the Iranian Revolutionary government in 1979 "also expressed the view that Iraq had a special interest in relations between the people of Iraq and the neighboring peoples of Iran and Turkey; for those people were not merely neighbors but brothers, with whom the Arab [in the Muslim sense] Nation in general and the Iraqi people in particular were related by old Islamic ties and a common history stretching over hundreds of years."<sup>76</sup> Iran and Iraq have many common interests and a part of those common interests takes places in the fact that Iran has a large influence over southern Iraq on an informal but economic and political basis. They share common bond of Shiite Islam, which stretches across the Iran/Iraq border and extends into southern Iraq, as well as the sharing of some of Iraq and Iran's richest oil producing lands. Iran, for the first time in over twenty years, has a chance to influence this particular region for both nations for a common good rather than continuing its violent support in support the southern Iraqi Shiites. However, Iranian influence could prove to be a threat to the other two tribes of Iraq: the Kurds and the Sunnis.

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<sup>76</sup> Ismael. *Iraq and Iran* 205.

To counter Iran's influences in Iraq, the United States led coalition needs to continue to police the border area between Iraq and Iran to prevent anti-Iranian operations within Iraq as well as to prevent the adoption of any sort of Iranian/Iraqi mutual defense treaty, which could prove to be a threat to the rest of the Persian Gulf. Jamal S al-Suwaidi, the Director General of the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, edited a book, *Iran and the Gulf*, which stated:

While there is little present prospect that Iran and Iraq would join together in a “devils bargain,” regimes change and sometimes do with unpredictable motives. Any serious Iranian and Iraqi cooperation in using military forces would rapidly alter the military balance in the Gulf and a combination of Iranian and Iraqi military forces could put far more militarily pressure on any combination of Western and Allied Gulf forces.<sup>77</sup>

Assistance in stopping anti-Iranian operations can be accomplished with United States led coalition forces or with groups such as the People's Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), an Islamic Socialist organization that advocates the overthrow of Iran's current government. Although using the MEK would be a drastic measure because of its goals, it is a tool that is available for countering Iranians influences within Iraq as well as in Iran.

The former United States Ambassador to Iraq, Ryan Cocker, was in negotiations with his Iranian counterpart starting in 2007 to help diffuse the delicate situation along the Iranian/Iraqi border. In late November 2007, Iran agreed to curtail the movement of weapons and Improvised Explosive Device (IEDs) components in exchange for the release of Revolutionary Guardsmen who had been captured by Coalition Forces, as well as the United States reducing its support to the MEK. Kenneth Katzman noted, “[s]ince December 2007, United States Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker, Secretary of Defense Gates, and General [David] Petraeus have reported that Shiite militia attacks on United States forces and Iranian weapons shipments had diminished.”<sup>78</sup> Because of this diplomatic focus as well as other factors such as

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<sup>77</sup> Jamal S al-Suwaidi.ed. *Iran and the Gulf*. (Abu Dhabi, UAE: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1996). 285.

<sup>78</sup>Kenneth Katzman. “Iran’s Activities and Influence in Iraq”. (Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service, 2008) 4.

the recent United States' troop surge, there has been a huge reduction in Coalition and Iraqi civilian deaths. Takeyh noted that:

The Islamic Republic now stands as one of the principle beneficiaries of America's regime-change policy. However, in assessing the ironies and paradoxes of the Middle East, one needs not descend into a zero-sum game, whereby any measure that benefits Iran is necessarily viewed as endangering America's interests. Much of the region and instability that has afflicted the critical Persian Gulf region in the past three decades has stemmed from animosity between Iran and Iraq. The contested borders, proxy wars, and finally a devastating eight year conflict between the two powers not only destabilized the middle East but threatened global economy, with its reliance on the regions' petroleum resources. The new Iraq emerging from the shadow of the American invasion will not just be a more humane society than the tyrannical Saddam Hussein regime; it will also be a more peaceful state willing to coexist easily with its Persian neighbor. And that development is not just good for Iran and Iraq but also for the United States.<sup>79</sup>

In addition, Sunni based countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council, a group formed partly to counter the spread of Iran's Islamic Revolution, need to put diplomatic pressure on Iran to discourage expansionism into the region. Key points of the DIME are the Diplomatic, Informational, and Military aspects.

## **Iran in Lebanon and Israel**

While the United States' primary focus in the region is dealing with Iraq and the Iranian influences there, it cannot ignore Iranian influences in Lebanon and Israel. Supporting terrorist organizations such as Palestinian Liberation Organization and Hezbollah has allowed Iran to influence events in Lebanon and Israel to its own benefit. James Philips, a Research Fellow for Middle Eastern Affairs at the Douglas and Sarah Allison Center for Foreign Policy Studies, claimed that:

Iran provides the bulk of Hezbollah's foreign support: arms, training, and money. Iranian Revolutionary Guards train Hezbollah terrorists and have provided them with sophisticated bombs and long range Katyusha rockets.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ray Takeyh. *Hidden Iran*. New York: (Times Books, 2006). 186-187.

<sup>80</sup> James Philips. 2006 *Iran and its Hezbollah Allies Escalate Their Aggressive Policies in the Middle East*. (The American Heritage Foundation. Washington D.C. USA. Accessed March 1, 2009). Available at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Iran/wm1159.cfm>

If Iran is not checked in Lebanon and Israel, there will only be an increase of Arab/Israeli hatred in the region, which can lead to the possibility of renewed conflict between Israel and its neighbors.

The United States must act diplomatically in this conflict by continuing to support Israel and condemn any aggressive or threatening action towards Israel from Iran and Syria. This is in keeping with the United States' strategic interest of ensuring Israel's existence. There is the potential in future negotiations with Iran over Iraq to further this secondary campaign. Philips further said that:

Washington should call for unconditional release of the Israeli hostages, the disarmament of all Lebanese militias, including Hezbollah, and international sanctions against Iran and Syria, which continue to support terrorism against Israel, as well as against Iraqis and coalition forces supporting the democratic Iraqi government. The United States correctly has strongly supported Israel's right to self-defense. It should veto any United Nations Security Council resolution that blames Israel for the current round of violence, which clearly was precipitated by attacks perpetrated by Palestinian and Lebanese terrorist groups<sup>81</sup>

Due to the focus of the United States on stabilizing Iraq against Iranian influences, the only thing that the United States can focus on with the Israel/Lebanon/Iran issue in regards to the DIME is the Diplomatic aspect.

## **Oil and Iranian Economics**

Today, oil is the one major issue that would be beneficial to both countries. For Iran, there is the need of oil to ensure its economic stability. For the United States there is the need to ensure there are stable oil supplies and prices so that there is a lessening of tensions in the region. The United States can focus its efforts in the economic arena by assisting in Iran's oil production and research. Iran's oil fields are some of the most productive in the world. Country Watch- Iran stated that:

Its yearly oil production is estimated at 3.98 million barrels a year. Iran is OPEC's second largest oil producer and holds about 10 percent of the world's proven oil reserves....

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

Around 80 to 90 percent of total export revenues are from petroleum and about 50 percent of the government revenue is generated from that industry.<sup>82</sup>

Although Iran has vast reserves in the Caspian Sea, those fields are relatively expensive to exploit without additional help. Iran and the United States could form an economic partnership that would allow Iran to benefit from outside economic and research to exploit those relatively virgin oil fields. With the United States' support, Iran can produce more oil and develop more sophisticated means of extraction.

Another avenue through which the United States can encourage economically is Iran's relationship with China and Russia and Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO is centered on its members' Central Asian security-related concerns, which include terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Katzman notes, "Iran, along with India and Pakistan, has been given observer status at the Central Asian security grouping called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization , which contains Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan."<sup>83</sup> Although the United States' traditional rivals Russia and China heavily influence the actions of the SCO, the SCO has the potential ability to turn Iran away from state sponsored terrorism. Additionally, if Iran gains full member status in the SCO, it will have the economic and security support of an organization that can influence Iran's action within the Persian Gulf region and the East. However, the impact of Iran joining the SCO will allow China and to expand its influence over Iran and in turn will allow China to gain a crucial foothold in Middle Eastern oil production and reduce the West's dominance of the region.

The United States, its Western Allies, and the Sunni dominated countries of the Gulf Region need to work together and use the favorable aspects of Globalization and the DIME to control the growing threat from Iran. The United States in particular needs to understand that it cannot fully control Iran through containment as this policy breeds distrust and resentment and the United States must be prepared

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<sup>82</sup> CountyWatch. 2009. Country Watch- Iran. (CountryWatch, Inc. Houston, Texas, USA. Accessed February 14, 2009). Available at [http://www.countrywatch.com.lumen.cgscarl.com/cw\\_topic](http://www.countrywatch.com.lumen.cgscarl.com/cw_topic)

<sup>83</sup> Kenneth Katzman. "Iran: U.S. Concerns and Policy Responses". (Washington D.C.: The Library of Congress, 2006). 28.

to sacrifice some of its control over the region to other countries to better facilitate Iran's growth. The United States needs to focus on continuing to regulate Iranian nuclear research but with positive influences rather than sanctions. If this approach fails, the United States, needs to work in conjunction with either the United Nations or North Atlantic Treaty Organization, to bring further pressure on Iran through diplomatic talks and the expansion of economic sanctions. The United States, the United Nations, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization also need to be prepared that if diplomacy and economic sanctions fail, then Iran will have to be dealt with militarily. The last thing that the United States can afford to do is to unilaterally conduct any type of military strike on Iran to destroy its nuclear program. The United States led coalition in Iraq needs to continue to negotiate with Iran in trying to stabilize the area but there still needs to be interdiction on the border area between Iraq and Iran and a continuation of anti-Iranian operations within Iraq. Economic sanctions should be lifted on Iran, with the caveat that Iran works with other countries in the region to reduce Radical Islamic terrorism and tries to find peaceful ways to settle their differences. al-Suwaidi said that, "[i]t is clear that the West and the Arab Gulf states must take every possible action to limit Iran and Iraq's present and future war fighting options and that such action must take place in four areas: arms control, limits on the transfer of technology and equipment."<sup>84</sup> With continuing Western economic support, Iran can become a greater contributor to the world economy with its vast oil reserves. Together, positive outside influences will help lessen the current government's religious fundamentalism and allow Western ideals and institutions to spread within Iran.

## **Conclusion**

### **An Enemy or an Ally?**

So what is the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United States? Is it a once and future ally that can be molded into a more democratic nation with our friendship and aid, or a continuing enemy? The United

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<sup>84</sup> Jamal S al-Suwaidi.ed. *Iran and the Gulf*. 285.

States has learned much in recent years about supporting corrupt governments for the sake of an alliance and the United States government understands the potential of a stable Iran in an unstable region. With Iran as our ally once again, the United States can influence the region even more so than it did in the 1970s because now the United States is allies with Saudi Arabia and the rest of the Persian Gulf States. With such a coalition of allies, the United States can turn its attention fully to the stabilization of Iraq and Afghanistan as well as deal with the Palestinian problem in Israel. With Iran as an enemy of the United States, there will be a continuing problem of dealing with Radical Islam and potential WMDs in the region and as a result, the continuing conflict will continue to cost the United States more lives, time, and money.

To remain enemies will allow Iran to continue to influence Syria, Hezbollah, and the Palestinians as well as becoming more firmly entrenched in formal and informal relationships with China and Russia. The realities of the world now mean that there are five facts that the United States must deal with. Fact One: Iran today has shifted from being more open and pro West (mid 1990s) to being much more repressive and back with its revolutionary roots on the domestic front. Fact Two: With the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime, Iran has become a greater regional power. Fact Three: In conjunction with the United States' invasion of Iraq and the power vacuum that it created, Iran has been able to exert an overt influence in Iraq through its relation with various Shiite organizations. Fact Four: The United States does not have any real way of forcing the Iranian regime to change its policies short of armed intervention. Fact Five: Over the years, Iran has become even more stubborn in standing up to the West because of the United States' missteps within the region.

### **The Three Big Mistakes**

In review, the United States has made three major mistakes in dealing with Iran, the severing of support for the Shah and the subsequent mishandling of the American Embassy seizure during the Carter Administration, the Iran-Contra Affair during the Reagan Administration, and the refusal of the Bush Administration to negotiate with Iran after the September 11 terrorist attacks.

The first mistake was in 1977 when President Carter cut military aid to the Shah thus contributing to his eventual overthrow. The loss of support for the Shah allowed the Islamic Revolution to grow in power and become the new Iranian government. When the Carter Administration allowed the exiled Shah to enter the United States for medical treatment, the new Iranian government became so enraged, that it allowed student demonstrators to seize the United States Embassy in Iran, which would eventually contribute to Carter losing the Presidency. Carter should have continued to support of the Shah but he should have used the aid as a carrot and slowly changed the corrupt actions of the Shah's and his government. In the end, the United States had the chance minimize the corruption and to push Iran towards democratic reform and free elections.

The second mistake was the Iran-Contra Affair in 1987. The Reagan Administration sold weapons to Iran in exchange for freeing American hostages held in Lebanon by Iranian backed Hezbollah terrorists. Not only did this support Iran in the ongoing Iran/Iraq War but Reagan broke faith with the American people for failing to rescue the hostages in a timely manner as well as dulling the government's official stance that "the United States doesn't negotiate with terrorist." Reagan should have continued the embargo against Iran and tried to open diplomatic channels to assist in curbing Iran's state sponsored terrorism.

The third and last mistake was twofold. The first part consisted of President Bush's speech, on January 29, 2002, describing Iran, along with North Korea and Iraq, as part of an "Axis of Evil." The speech caused outrage throughout Iran, whose population was semi-neutral or sympathetic to the United States because of the September 11 attacks. The second part took place in 2003, prior to the invasion of Iraq, when Iran approached the United States with an offer to help the United States stabilize Iraq after the invasion, disarm Hezbollah, and make concessions with its nuclear program. The Bush Administration turned down these offers, which would have resolved many outstanding issues between the United States and Iran. These acts pushed a semi-moderate Iran further away from the United States and encouraged it to undermine the United States actions in Iraq. Bush refused to listen to the advice of

the State Department under Colin Powell and instead relied on the input of Vice President Richard Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld who refused to let go of old and bitter memories of the thirty year conflict between the United States and Iran.

## **Iran's Goals**

Today, Iran wants to change the status quo in the region; it wants to vie for greater influence in the Gulf and in turn become a greater power in the world. However, Iran is not a prosperous, strong, or unified country. It only has the ability to project its presence into nearby Iraq but not the region in general. If Iran is continually isolated and remains a closed society due to its traditional Islamic views and the United States' flawed policy of containment, it will be feared and distrusted by the other Persian Gulf states and the rest of the world, thus losing out on its economic prospects and cultural influence.

Iran, if it is not economically the equal of the United States, has the ability to increase its strength in the future. Potentially, if Iran is ever to gain a clear influence or control in Iraq, it will also gain the combined wealth of the two country's oil assets, with the ability to outperform the petroleum production of the rest of the Persian Gulf countries combined. This economic and political union of Iraq and Iran has the potential to further lead to a renewed conflict in the Middle East between Sunni vs. Shiite. Therefore, it is critical to stabilization that Iran and Iraq remain separated as countries.

## **The United States' Counter**

So what does the United States do about Iran? The United States, the West, and the Sunni dominated countries of the Persian Gulf region need to work together and use the favorable aspects of Globalization and the DIME to positively influence Iran. It is up to the United States to take the lead and develop a strategy that will be beneficial for the region. This strategy has to be founded on the United States', the West's understanding of how Iran works politically, and a realization that Iranians do not think the same way as Westerners do. Moreover, there has to be an understanding that the United States must also change its policies and prejudices towards Iran.

First, the United States and its allies need to understand that Iran is not the Soviet Union, socially, politically, or economically. To pigeonhole Iran into the Cold War model of containment does nothing to help the volatile situation between Iran and the United States and its allies. Iran has the ability to receive outside political and economical support from Russia and China, which are key players on the United Nations Security Council and can easily counter any action from the United States and its allies.

The United States and the West needs to focus on continuing to regulate Iranian nuclear research but with positive influences rather than negative ones. This means lifting economic sanctions between Iran and the West in exchanges for monitoring of the nuclear program. If regulation fails then the United States in conjunction with either the United Nations or the North Atlantic Treaty Organization needs to conduct limited military strikes on Iran to destroy their nuclear program. This of course will only further inflame the conflict between the United States and Iran and stifle any chance of peace.

The United States led coalition in Iraq needs to continue to control the border area between Iraq and Iran to stop the flow of materials and personnel as well as to focus on stopping Iranian operations within the borders of Iraq. The Iraqi government needs to appeal to and work hand in hand with Iran to focus on mutual strength and ideals between the two countries to stabilize the area. In addition, the Sunni dominated countries need to put diplomatic pressure on Iran to discourage expansionism into the region as well as to reduce Radical Islamic terrorism and try to find a peaceful way to settle their differences.

Economic sanctions should be lifted on Iran. With the support of the United States instead of China and Russia, Iran can become a greater contributor to the world economy with its vast oil reserves. With Saudi Arabia and the other the western Gulf States already as allies, the United States can continue to dominate the region by funding and providing assistance into research for superior facilities in Iran. This will allow Iran to have a higher petroleum output and be equipped with even better means of extracting oil from hard-to-reach fields.

To have Iran as an ally again will help stabilize the region and deter aggression between the Arab Gulf Countries and Iran which are traditional enemies not only in the Sunni vs. Shiite sense but in the

Persian vs. Arab sense as well. Most importantly, having Iran as an ally will deter the continuing rise of Radical Islamic views within Iran and in its place a more moderate Iranian government that can influence the countries all around it. In the end, it would be beneficial for Iran to become a United States' ally and not its continuing enemy. If this is not possible due to the base differences over ideas such as the United States support for ensuring Israel's survivability, then maybe the conflict between Iran and the United States can be reduced to a neutrality with a focus towards settling each country's differences in an international forum.

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